

Chai and Chat: What is mental health? What is mental illness?

What is Mental Health?

The World Health Organization defines mental health as "a state of well-being in which the individual realizes his or her own abilities, can cope with the normal stresses of life, can work productively and fruitfully, and is able to make a contribution to his or her community" (<https://www.who.int/news-room/fact-sheets/detail/mental-health-strengthening-our-response>).

How do you know when you have good mental health?

Here is a short check list.

- Self-esteem: Feeling good about who you are
- Managing emotions: Recognizing and expressing a wide range of emotions constructively
- Responding to stress: Managing and coping well with stress
- Mindfulness: Being aware of the details of this moment
- Relaxation: Being able to unwind and calm the body and mind
- Getting help: Seeking or accepting help from others when needed

(<https://wellness.asu.edu/explore-wellness/mind/emotional-well-being>)

Early Warning Signs

Not sure if you or someone you know is living with mental health problems? Experiencing one or more of the following feelings or behaviors can be an early warning sign of a problem:

- Eating or sleeping too much or too little
- Pulling away from people and usual activities
- Having low or no energy
- Feeling numb or like nothing matters
- Having unexplained aches and pains
- Feeling helpless or hopeless
- Smoking, drinking, or using drugs more than usual
- Feeling unusually confused, forgetful, on edge, angry, upset, worried, or scared
- Yelling or fighting with family and friends

(<https://www.mentalhealth.gov/basics/what-is-mental-health>)

What is the phone number for your mental health clinic?

What is the address for your mental health clinic?

What is Mental Illness?

The Mayo Clinic defines it as, "a wide range of mental health conditions — disorders that affect your mood, thinking and behavior. Examples of mental illness include depression, anxiety disorders, schizophrenia, eating disorders and addictive behaviors."

Many people have mental health concerns from time to time. But a mental health concern becomes a mental illness when ongoing signs and symptoms cause frequent stress and affect your ability to function.

When should you seek help?

- Experiencing severe mood swings that cause problems in relationships
- Having persistent thoughts and memories you can't get out of your head
- Hearing voices or believing things that are not true
- Thinking of harming yourself or others
- Inability to perform daily tasks like taking care of your kids or getting to work or school

What can I do to keep my mental health strong?

Take breaks from watching, reading, or listening to news stories, including those on social media.

Take care of your body

- Eat healthy, well-balanced meals
- Exercise regularly
- Get plenty of sleep
- Avoid excessive use of alcohol and tobacco

Make time to unwind — Try to do some other activities you enjoy

Connect with others—talk with people you trust about your concerns

Connect with your community or faith based organizations

<https://www.cdc.gov/mentalhealth/stress-coping/cope-with-stress/index.html>

Advice from the Bible; the example of Joseph

Genesis 37, 39-50 tells the story of a man named Joseph. He was his father's favorite son. This favoritism so angered his brothers that on a whim, they sold 17 year old Joseph into slavery into Egypt. This happened around 1700 B.C.

While in Egypt, he became the slave of a wealthy and important political figure, Potiphar. Through Joseph was completely innocent, Potiphar's wife accused him of rape and Joseph landed in prison.

When in prison, the prison guards recognized his abilities and gave him responsibility over the other prisoners. One day he interpreted the dreams of two men who were sent to prison by Pharaoh. Both of the dreams came true. One of the men was executed but the other man lived. The one who lived did not mention Joseph's name to anyone who could have helped Joseph. *Joseph was betrayed twice and forgotten once. What might you be thinking or feeling if you were Joseph?*

Then there was a change of fortune for Joseph. The prisoner who knew Joseph mentioned Joseph's name to the Pharaoh who had dreams no one could interpret. Joseph was taken out of prison and made second in command for the whole nation when he was 30 years old. But what about his brothers?

Eventually, his brothers came to Egypt to buy food because there was a famine everywhere. Only Egypt had food. Joseph recognized his brothers but they did not recognize him. Before he revealed himself to them he put them through a series of clever tests to see if their attitude had changed towards their father. Did they feel remorse for lying to their father about Joseph? How did they treat Joseph's younger brother, Benjamin? Only when Joseph was convinced of their sorrow over what they had done, did he offer them forgiveness and a restoration of their relationship.

What can we learn from this story about the steps toward restoring relationships? What part does God play?

Should we attempt to restore every broken relationship we experience? Not necessarily. Paul was harmed by a man named, Alexander. Instead of reconciling with Alexander, Paul warns others to stay away from him because of his harmful and evil ways (2 Timothy 4:14,15).

Chai and Chat: Conflicts and Mental Distress

Conflicts in relationships can cause a huge amount of mental and emotional distress. We may want our relationships restored, but is it possible or even wise? Usually conflicts arise from disagreements of all kinds or behaviors that have hurt each other. There are healthy and unhealthy ways to deal with conflict.

Give an example of an unhealthy way to deal with conflict.

What are some successful ways to restore relationships?

Douglas Stone, Bruce Patton, and Sheila Heen wrote a book called Difficult Conversations. In it they outline successful ways to resolve conflict. The first step is to try to look objectively at the conflict to gain perspective, asking, "What happened." The goal is to gain understanding, not to blame or determine who is right or wrong or to assume you know why they did what they did. Think of yourself as an objective news reporter who is looking for the facts, not making conclusions about the facts. This step takes communication skills. These skills may look like this as you approach the other person.

1. "I noticed that you.... I am confused about what you did. Can you help me understand what was going on?" In this way, you are not aggressively blaming the other person for anything and they will not be as defensive, which shuts down communication immediately.
2. After the person has explained and you have listened without interrupting or correcting, ask to speak next. Explain your perspective and how you felt.
3. Apologize for your part in the conflict and say what you both want. Look for solutions that satisfy you both. "How can we solve the problem? What do you need? What can we do better the next time?

What do you think is the strength and weakness of this method?

Are you likely to try this method out?

Thumbprint stories from our readings or discussion.